FAST LANE

MICHAEL POLAND
HELPING TO RESHAPE RACING

NICOLAS RUSSO
A CREATIVE WITH A DIFFERENT VIEW ON LIFE AND RACING

BILLY KRUCK
WE DO GOOD NOT BECAUSE IT CAME EASY...WE WORKED FOR IT.

MARC MCCLASKEY
FAMILY AND MEMORIES BUILT AT THE TRACK LAST FOREVER

SOUTHERN N/T NATIONALS
HOW JACOB HARPER PUT TEXAS ON THE MAP

FAST LANE COLLECTIVE SEPTEMBER 2025

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The Fast Lane Collective

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FROM OUR EDITOR

When we started Fast Lane Collective, our goal was simple: capture the stories that too often go untold. The grit behind the glamour, the long nights behind the win lights, and the community that makes all of it possible. This September issue is our clearest picture yet of what that looks like.

Inside these pages, you'll find six stories that anchor today's grassroots racing scene. Marc Mcclaskey shows us what it means to build not just a program but a presence. Ethan Williams embodies the heart of Hood 2 Hood Racing and the belief that family and faith can power a team as much as any engine. Jacob Harper is pushing the envelope with high-stakes no-time events while still staying true to the racers in his pits. Nicolas Russo is redefining motorsports media, proving that authentic storytelling still wins in an age of highlight reels. Billy Kruck brings the builder's eye and racer's fire to everything he touches. And Michael Poland continues to bridge the gap between veteran experience and the next wave of up and coming racers.

Each profile is more than an article, it's a snapshot of a movement. Together, they reveal the real strength of this sport: people who don't just race, but invest, mentor, create, and innovate. People who believe in showing up even when the cameras aren't rolling.

As you turn these pages, I hope you feel the same thing we did while putting this issue together: the heartbeat of a community that's as passionate about its people as it is about its machines. This is racing without filters: loud, loyal, and alive.

Thank you for reading, sharing, and believing in Fast Lane Collective. You're the reason we can keep telling these stories.

Milissa Martini
Editor in Chief, Fast Lane Collective

SOUTHERN NO TIME NATIONALS

SEASON 8

"Two hundred thousand dollars
doesn't just draw cars,
it draws the very best."

TRACK STAFF

BUILDING THE STAGE

HOW JACOB HARPER PUT TEXAS ON THE MAP

The Southern No Time Nationals has quickly become one of the biggest events in small tire racing, but its roots trace back to Jacob Harper's very first race in Shreveport, Louisiana. Originally, Harper had hoped to secure a date at another track, but things didn't line up. "They just would not give me a date," he recalled. Determined to make something happen, he kept calling facilities until Shreveport stepped up with the only date that worked for him. That decision changed everything.

"If it had been at some of the other tracks, it wouldn't have even been called the Southern No Time Nationals," Harper said. The name wasn't tied to the venue so much as the region. "If I'd gone to Darlington, I probably would've come up with a different name."

The now famous Bear Shit Only shootout came later, about two years ago, born out of Friday night downtime. "The guys who ran my free entry shootout wanted to do something instead of just making test passes," Harper explained. "So me and Dominique said, 'If we can get eight cars, they put up a thousand each, we'll put up two thousand on top, and it's ten grand to win. That's how Bear Shit started."

HATER MAKER
IT BACK
HE TRAILER!!

From those humble beginnings, the purse skyrocketed. “It was an evolution, a process,” Harper said. “At one point it was tough just to fill eight cars. But it grew from $10,000, to $20,000, to $50,000, then $100,000 last September and by March we were up to where we are now. I’d be lying if I said I expected it, but I knew we were building something. The 28x275 racing, in my opinion, had untapped potential. It was just a matter of sticking with it and keeping it going. But, at the end of the day, it still takes a bunch of dedicated racers to fill something of this magnitude.”

For Harper, the appeal of 275 racing was always clear. “When I first started throwing races, I did 315s and 275s, but they were two different shootouts. The 315 slowly died off. It’s still in Radial vs. the World, but 275, in my opinion, is true small tire. To me, it’s basically no rules other than you need doors on your car and a 275 tire. That appealed to racers who wanted to see who’s the fastest, baddest man on a 275. Make no mistake about it it’s a very, very fast class. It’s wide open. Maybe at some point we’ll add rules to keep things balanced, but right now, it’s simply about who can come out and be the fastest man on a 275.”

Even the name “Bear Shit Only” came together organically. “I’m not sure if it was Dominique, I’m not sure if it was me. Maybe it was a combination of both of us,” Harper laughed.

What he remembers clearly is the reaction when he first announced the $200,000 purse. That happened at PRI in December. “The reaction from racers was pretty exciting. It was a big ordeal,” he said.

By then, Harper had already built credibility with a $100,000 to win Southern No Time Nationals 7. “I like to put my races out early, just to give everybody a chance to plan and make adjustments. But that leap into $200,000 was something I was pushed to do. At PRI, I had conversations with Clyde and Gaylen, and they both encouraged me to go for it.”

While the race is open entry, Harper takes care to keep it competitive. “Anybody can enter, but we vet all the cars. That’s not to disrespect anyone, but I don’t want to just take somebody’s $2,500 if I know they probably wouldn’t be very successful.

We'd rather keep the field tight. And this year's field there are a number of cars that can win. It's going to be really close, and honestly, it'll take someone with a little bit of luck."

Behind the big numbers is a simple formula. "We base it on 64 cars at $2,500 each. Then we put $40,000 on top. That's how you get to $200,000," Harper explained. But money isn't the only challenge. "Most races, what keeps me up at night is the weather. This is a mother nature dependent business. All I really hope for is rain free. If it's rain free, we can adjust and maneuver around everything else."

The responsibility of carrying such a high stakes event rests heavily on him. "It's pressure because everything that goes with this race is 100 percent on me," Harper said. "Dominique joined me and I've been teaching him the ropes. He's an important part of the team now, and I'm making sure he's prepared to help lead these races into the future.

BIG JAKE PROMOTIONS
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FREE ENTRY – CLASS CARS WELCOME
275 OR 28W OR SMALLER
ANY POWER ADDER ANY CHASSIS
CLASS CARS ARE WELCOME
ASAG SHOOTOUT - $10,000 TO WIN
FREE ENTRY
NO CLASS CARS
LEXAN FRONT & REAR OK
275 OR 28S OR SMALLER LADDER BAR & 4-LINKS OK
ANY POWER ADDER
NO WHEELIE BARS
STEEL DOORS REQUIRED UNLESS FACTORY REAL SIDE GLASS WINDOWS REQUIRED
NO MOLDED 1PC CF/FB FRONT ENDS ALLOWED AT ALL
STEEL FENDERS REQUIRED UNLESS FACTORY
OUTLAW STREET - $5,000 TO WIN
FREE ENTRY
NO CLASS CARS
BOOSTED BIG BLOCKS 9.8 DECK HEIGHT MAXIMO BILLET HEADS OR BLOCKS) 3700LBS
NO ALL BILLET BOOSTED SMALL BLOCK(HEADS OR BLOCKS ONLY NOT BOTH)
BOWLS OR BORE SPACE OR SMALLER
WORKING HEAD & TAIL LIGHTS
FACTORY FLOORS REQUIRED
FACTORY FIREWALL REQUIRED
FACTORY APPEARING DASHBOARD REQUIRED(NO REAL ASS OR CARBON OK)
REAL "SIDE" GLASS WINDOWS(LEXAN GLASS ALSO) REQUIRED
NO 1PC CF/FG FRONT END (STEEL/"FACTORY" FENDERS REQUIRED)
NO CF/FG DOORS (UNLESS FACTORY)
STEEL DOORS REQUIRED
2 FRONT SEATS REQUIRED
NO WHEELIE BARS
LADDER BARS & 4 LINKS OK
NO FULL CHASSIS CARS
NO FORWARD FACING SCOOPS
275R OR 28RR BLOCKS (NO WE)
XTREME RACEWAY PARK
YOU GOT

What sets the Southern No Time Nationals apart, Harper believes, is more than money. "Yeah, the payout is a big deal, but it didn't happen overnight. It took years to build to this point. You can't just make a flyer, put rules on it, and say it's $100,000 to win. That's why so many others fail. This has been a process."

He credits much of the success to Xtreme Raceway Park itself. "XRP is just a different kind of vibe. I've been to the biggest world series, the biggest no time races, the biggest class races. Some tracks just have a feel to them, and XRP has that. The racers and the fans there create an atmosphere you don't get anywhere else. In my opinion, there's no fans better than the fans we have at Xtreme Raceway Park."

That energy has drawn people from around the world. "We've had fans come from as far as Australia multiple people. Racers drive from California, Florida, up north. They come from everywhere. But the excitement and energy at XRP is unmatched. You just don't get that anywhere else. Bottom line."

For Texas racing, the impact has been huge.

"For years, people wouldn't make the trip to Texas. We weren't known as a place that threw big time grudge races. Don't get me wrong, we had plenty of events, but not on a nationwide level. These two races changed that. They're respected nationally not just in no time, but even in NHRA and other major organizations."

Looking ahead, Harper expects continued growth. "Humbly, I think we'll just get bigger. Next year, it'll still be the same two races, but we're adding a points championship with Justin 'Little Country.' That gives racers more opportunities, more reasons to build cars and chase wins. In my opinion, that'll only help the sport grow and help these races grow too."

For Harper, the support system behind him has been vital. "My family and the racers, first and foremost. I've got a great circle of friends and family who push me to stay true to who I am. And I started this by racing. I still race, even if I don't get to as much now. That, to me, separates me from a lot of promoters I've got skin in the game."

He points to one longtime friend in particular.

"Gaylen has always pushed me to be a stand-up guy, to stand on everything I put on a flyer, to keep my character high, to be a man of my word. That's what matters."

Sponsorship is another key piece. "I have a ton of sponsors...so many I'd be here all day if I named them all. I'll send you the list. But I chase sponsors, and I have no shame in saying that. Races of this magnitude require it. Just in payouts alone, we're committed to $80,000 to $90,000. Sponsors are essential. And the thing is, they love being part of Big Jake Promotions. They don't hesitate to step in and support. I can't thank them enough."

Harper is as excited as any fan. "Thursday night has so many great matchups. Personally, I'm looking forward to Louis Vuitton versus Kong. Michael Hawes drives Vuitton, Kallee Mill drives Kong. That's going to be a really good race. I'm also excited to see Justin and Prenup run Rent Free out of Michigan. There are just a ton of great races this year."

He believes the new three day format makes it all possible.

"Thursday is for grudge races, Friday and Saturday are for shootouts. Back in the day, we had to cram everything into two days. Now, with Thursday, racers get to line up for the thrill races they want. Like I tell people, Thursday they race for their own money, Friday and Saturday they race for mine."

The growth has brought logistical challenges, too. Parking was tight at the last event, but adjustments are in place. "We hired a few parkers to help navigate people and get them where they need to go. Last time it was kind of a free for all. This time, it'll be organized."

"Spectators are $30 per day, Thursday through Saturday. Parking is free on the spectator side, $30 on the pit side. If you come in Thursday, you pay for the whole weekend unless you park on the spectator side, where it's day by day. But I always suggest early arrival. The spectator side fills up fast. The pit side has more room, especially if it doesn't rain."

As for attendance, Harper knows the crowd will be massive. "I don't have an exact number, but I know there will be thousands and thousands of fans. At the end of the day, it'll be a great show."

When the final pair of cars stage for $200,000, Harper admits the moment will carry weight. "Honestly, it'll be amazing and wonderful, but also really gratifying."

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Meet Billy Kruck

His story begins at sixteen, the age when most kids are just learning how to navigate the world, but for him it was the age he found the track.

As soon as he was old enough to drive there, that's where his weekends were spent leaning against the fence, watching the big cars thunder down the lanes. Somewhere in the mix of burnouts and fast passes, there was always Ginger. He'd noticed her for years, the girl with the pink dragster, but back then it felt like another world. She had the fast car, the confidence, the name everyone knew at the strip. Billy never imagined their paths would cross for real.

Life, of course, had its own way of shifting the lanes. A tragic car accident left Billy laid up at home, grieving the loss of his best friend Bundy. His dad had been driving when the wreck happened; both boys were thrown from the car, but only Billy survived. It was the kind of heartbreak that changes a man's outlook, and in those quiet, painful days, he wasn't expecting much from the outside world. Then the phone rang.

On the other end was Ginger. She teased him at first "I'll give you a hint, I've got a pink dragster" and when he recognized her voice, something in the weight of the moment shifted. She invited him out with friends that night, even mentioned trying to set him up with someone else. Billy hesitated, still raw from loss, but in his gut he felt Bundy pushing him forward. "Man, go and have a good time," he told himself. And so he did.

When the night came, the supposed friend never showed. Instead, it was Ginger, surrounded by her girlfriends, and suddenly the possibility he'd never dared to imagine was right in front of him. They talked all evening, and what started as chance turned into forever. Billy and Ginger have now been married twenty-two years, raising their son Scotty and building a life rooted in racing and resilience.

Ginger's own story runs deep in the sport. Her father,

Scott Martin, was a respected racer whose name carried weight at every track he touched. She lost him when she was just sixteen, he never woke up one race day morning, taken suddenly by a heart attack. Four years later, her mother passed away as well. From then on, the track became more than just a place to race; it was the only home she knew. Weekends were for racing, no exceptions. It was a rhythm she carried into her adult life, and eventually into her partnership with Billy.

Billy's side wasn't all that different. Straight out of high school, he hustled to buy his first car. His mom held things together at home while his dad drove trucks, and Billy learned early that work and tinkering in the garage weren't hobbies they were survival skills. He spent his days tightening bolts, learning the rhythm of engines, and figuring out how to make something run better with the little he had.

Together, he and Ginger weren't just another racing couple. They were two stories of grit colliding at the right moment, bound by loss, resilience, and the stubborn kind of love that grows when you share both heartbreak and horsepower.

For Billy, the early days of racing weren't just about making passes they were about building something from nothing. Still in high school, he scraped together enough to buy a '68 Camaro with a 3.55 rear gear. He and his twin brother Bobby would drive it out to the airport, fill it with aviation fuel, and head back to tinker and test. That's where it all really started, the first taste of building horsepower and figuring out what a car could do under his own hands.

Racing wasn't just the foundation of Billy's story it was the foundation of his and Ginger's life together. As their relationship grew serious, Ginger made the hard call to sell her dragster. She wanted to start a family, and she knew that meant shifting gears. Billy sold his Camaro too, but not without purpose. The money he made off that car bought the wedding ring he placed on Ginger's hand. Together, they pooled what they had, shut the doors on one chapter of racing, and opened another...family.

Scotty was part of the plan from the start. Ginger, an only child, told Billy she only wanted one. Billy, on the other hand, was set on having a son. When the ultrasound confirmed it, he couldn't contain himself. "I started jumping up and down and crying," he remembered. "I only had one shot at this, and I got my boy."

From the time Scotty could stand, racing was already part of his world. At just four years old, Billy strapped him into a junior dragster. While other kids eventually drifted into distractions as they grew older, Scotty stayed locked in on the track. "The only thing we were getting into was drag racing," Billy said.

At first, like most kids, Scotty struggled with red lights,

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tripping them pass after pass. But Billy stayed patient, coaching him until the nerves turned into precision. Before long, Scotty was cutting perfect lights and putting together rounds with consistency that left the junior dragster class in his dust. Looking back, Billy admits he might have moved him up too soon Scotty was that good in the juniors. “Those last couple of years, he was killing it. I should have kept him there a little longer. But I was just ready to see him in a big car.”

Today, that big car is his domain. While Billy has the know how to build motors himself, he’s not too proud to hand the work over to professionals. “I don’t want to be like other racers, always having car problems, leaking oil, chasing issues. We could do it ourselves, but we’ve had a lot better success letting somebody else handle it. That way, when we roll out, we know the car’s right.”

It’s a family effort Billy and Ginger at the track, Scotty behind the wheel, each of them bringing their piece to the puzzle. Racing, for the Krucks, isn’t just a pastime. It’s the framework of their life, a rhythm passed from father to son, stitched into every sacrifice, every victory, and every night spent at the track chasing perfection.

On race day, the Kruck team runs like a well-oiled machine. Scotty handles the tuning, Billy makes sure everything stays together, and Ginger anchors the support behind them both. “I’m the rock,” Billy said with a grin. “He does all the tuning, but I make sure we get to the track and back, and that everything’s lined out.”

When asked about a most memorable pass, Billy didn’t hesitate. “It’s got to be the one when my mom was diagnosed with stage four cancer. We said we were going to win that race for her, and we did. That was special. It wasn’t about money or trophies it was about her.” For Billy, that moment still stands taller than any high-dollar win.

Every weekend, the Krucks load up and head out. The travel is relentless six, seven hours one way, week after week. Billy does nearly all the driving while Ginger and Scotty rest. Tires blow out, fuel costs bite, and the road wears heavy, but they keep showing up. “If there’s a race happening that fits one of our cars, we’re going to be there,” Billy said. “It’s just what we do.”

As much as they chase wins, Billy is honest about what keeps the program alive: luck and loyalty. “It’s a hobby for us,” he said. “If we didn’t have luck on our side and win the way we do, there’s no way we could afford it. Between entry fees and fuel, it’s crazy. Winning helps cover it, but sponsors help too.”

Fuel sponsorship has been critical. “I haven’t paid for fuel in a couple years thanks to our sponsor,” Billy explained. Nitrous companies have also stepped in, offering equipment and discounts that make the difference between showing up or staying home. But sponsorship isn’t just parts it’s politics too.

Billy shared the tough decision of switching from one nitrous company to another, a move that came down to what was best for his program. “We had great stuff on our cars already, but when another company stepped up and wanted to support us more, we had to look at the bigger picture. This isn’t cheap, and if someone believes in us and wants to help, we’ve got to take that seriously.”

The transition wasn’t without tension. Loyalty runs deep in racing, and Billy admitted it hurt to walk away from people he respected. But at the end of the day, he had to think about keeping his cars competitive. “We’re Nitrous Express now, and we’re proud to

represent them. We'll do our best by them just like we always have."

Behind the stickers and the staging lights, racing takes sacrifice. The Krucks work full-time jobs during the week, then spend their nights and weekends keeping five different cars ready to race. The moment one weekend ends, the cars are unloaded, checked, and prepped for the next. They pick which car gives them the best shot and load up again. "People don't always see it, but it's constant," Billy said. "We work so hard to stay competitive. Racing is what we do, what we know. But at the end of the day, it's still a hobby. It doesn't pay the bills. When we get lucky and win, it helps, but the work never stops."

Ask Scotty about dream cars or unlimited budgets, and he doesn't hesitate to shrug it off. "If money and time were no object? Honestly, I don't know if I'd even want to run one of those huge programs," he said. "That's not fun to me. I like to race, not just work on cars all day. Those big teams have three, four, five guys in the trailer, three or four spare motors, and it's nothing but work. That's not what this life is about for us."

Still, there are bucket-list tracks. No Mercy in Georgia has always been one of them. They've been to watch, but not to compete. That changes now. "We've already paid for our spot. We're bringing two cars. Scotty's going to run, and we're lining up with some of the best in the country. We're thrilled!"

PRI is also circled on their calendar. The crew Jake, Ashley, and Charlie Strickland will be heading out together. "I like keeping the team small," Billy said.

"That's our group right there, and we're looking forward to making that trip together. Now that we've got Nitrous Express on board, they'll be there, and I think it's going to be a big party. We're excited."

As for the future, the Kruck stable has already grown to six cars, including a brand-new twin-turbo setup they're debuting at Holly Springs. The question isn't whether they'll grow it's whether they can keep pace with the momentum they've already built. "Five years from now? If we're still doing what we're doing right now, I'll be thrilled," Billy said. "Right now, I feel like we're on top. We've got targets on our backs, and we've got plenty of haters. But they say if you don't have haters, you're not doing something right."

And what about Scotty, the one strapped into the car every weekend, carrying the weight of expectation?

"Three or four years ago, I felt pressure," he admitted.

"Back then, I thought about it more. But now? It's just another day. Even if it's 10, 20 grand on the line, I don't stress. I don't think about it too hard I just get in the car and do my thing

For Billy, watching Scotty compete is more than pride it's pure joy. "It's awesome," he said. "My wife raced her whole life, that's all she knew. I've been trying to get her back in the car too maybe once I get this new one painted purple, she'll get back in it. But man, it's a blessing, an honor, to watch Scotty race with the talent he's got. We'll go up there in a $30,000 grudge race, and they'll try to double bulb him, try to rattle him, and he just does the same thing over and over. You can't rattle this kid. It's badass."

Racing isn't a separate world for the Kruck family it's woven into their home life. "It all kind of merges together," Billy explained. "We've got the boats, the pool, all of that, but racing is what we do. It's all we know. And my wife and I are on the same page. You're not going to talk to anybody who wants to race harder than us. We just love it."

Still, the grudge world brings its share of chaos. Billy admits it isn't always fun. "We like grudge racing, but it gets messy. We show up with the money. If we lose, we shake the guy's hand, tell him good job, and pay up. But a lot of people don't have the money to lose, and then it gets personal. We just want to race, spend time with family and friends. If we win, we want to get paid. If we lose, we'll pay. But not everybody sees it that way."

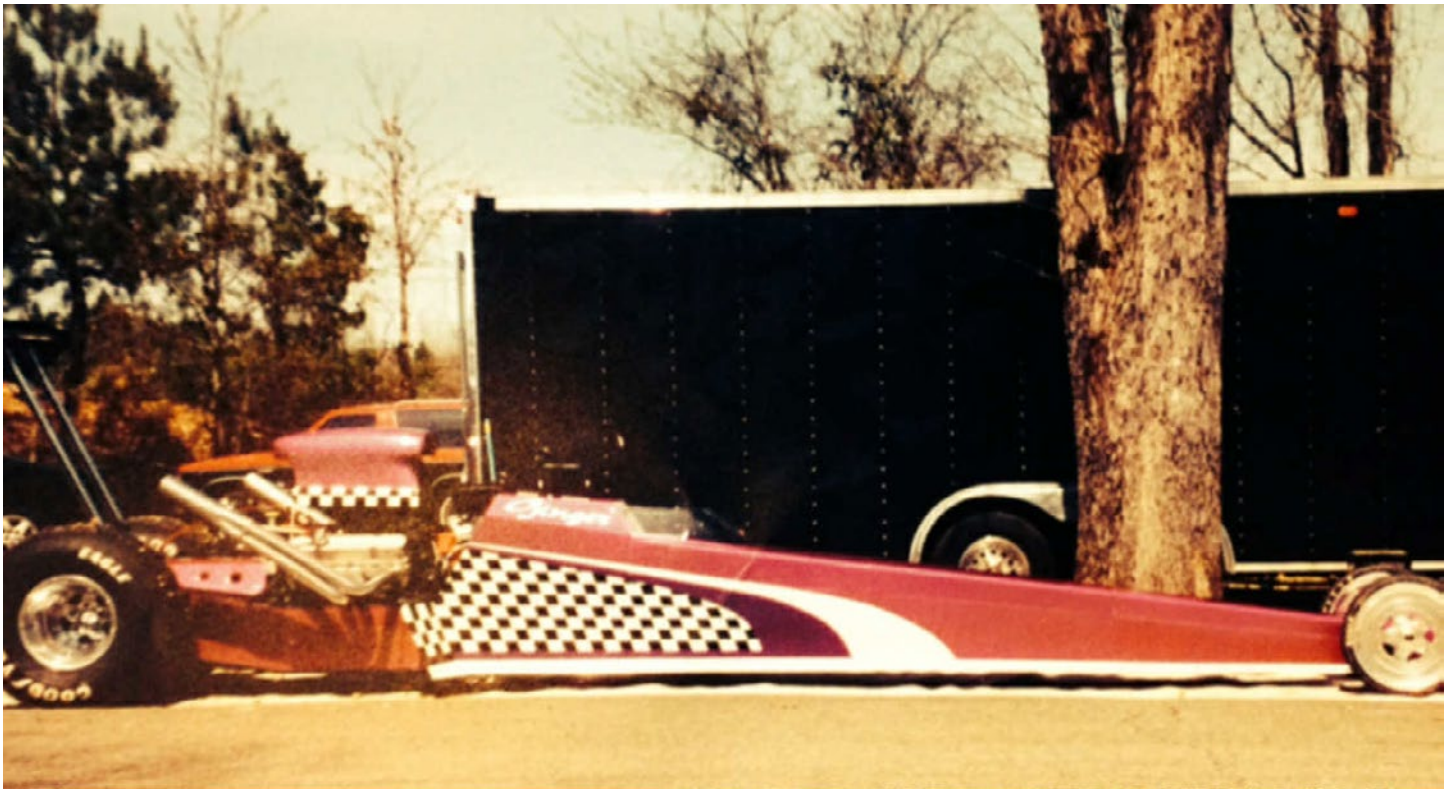
Sometimes that tension has escalated into fights. "It's unfortunate it comes down to that," Billy said. "Because all we want is to be at the track, racing with our family. They make it harder than it has to be."

When people hear the Kruck name, Billy hopes it carries a clear message. "I want them to know they better bring their A-game. There are certain racers we respect because when we line up with them, it makes us better. That's what I want for people to use us as a tool to better their program."

For the next generation, Billy's hope is simple: that racing keeps kids on the right path. "I see so many kids out there just messing up," he said. "But with Scotty and with Ginger growing up at the track it's been different. The track is an awesome place. It keeps kids out of trouble. They can't afford to be into drugs or trouble because racing takes everything you've got. I'm biased, but all I know is the race world, and I think it's a good place to be."

His advice to families thinking about getting into it? Go all in. "If it's something they want, I'd tell them to chase it. Chase your dreams. The sky's the limit. Scotty didn't have much choice his mama grew up racing, all I knew was racing. But even then, if he wanted to play ball or do something else, we'd have supported it. Turns out, all he wants to do is race. And thank goodness, because that's all we want to do too."

For fans wanting to keep up with the Kruck family, the best way is through their own channels. "We've got a YouTube page 'Kruck Racing' and a Facebook page too," Billy said. "Chris Fleming helped us out a lot at first, then Kyreke came along and pitched in. I need to be more active on it, but that's where people can follow along."



GINGER'S PINK DRAGSTER

As for how he wants the family remembered when the helmets eventually come off, Billy thought for a moment. "That we were there. That we put in the work. That we did good but not because it just came easy. We worked for it."

The Krucks know better than most that racing doesn't happen without support. Sponsorships, no matter how big or small, make the difference between showing up and staying home. "Anything helps," Billy said. "People don't always realize how much it costs just to go down the track. Gas, nitrous it adds up every pass. If we didn't win the way we've been winning, there's no way we could travel every weekend like we do."

The next stretch of races is already mapped out. Scotty's turbo car will be out the Sunday after we did this interview. After that, there's Jake's race, Clash of the Titans, and the Hood 2 Hood Picnic. "These races have me excited. I'd love nothing more than to win them for our new partners at Nitrous Express. They've backed us in a big way, and we want to make them proud."

With new parts going on and races right around the corner, there's always the question of testing. Were the Krucks worried about running fresh equipment without track time? Billy answered with the calm certainty of someone who's been here before. "I'm not worried. It's never easy, and we don't take anything for granted, but I've got faith in our program. I've got faith in our driver. I don't think anybody out there is a better driver than what we've got. Our cars are dialed in. If somebody beats us, hats off to them they earned it."

The field ahead at Big Jakes Race for Lil Gangstas is no joke. Thirty-two cars, all killers, all proven winners. "There are no ducks in this race," Billy said. "It's tough. Every race is tough. Anybody who says it's easy hasn't done it or hasn't won. But we're blessed. I don't want to sound conceited, but we are on top right now. And the only reason we're here is because of the work we put in."

With that, Billy leaned back, steady as ever. The road hasn't been easy, but for the Kruck family, the grind is the point. Faith in the cars, faith in the driver, and faith that when the beams drop, they'll be ready.

The McClaskey Way

Marc McClaskey has been around racing long enough to know that cars come and go, but the family and memories built at the track last forever. His story stretches back nearly two decades, but like so many racers, the fire sparked years before he ever pulled into a staging lane. “Legally, I started racing about 16 or 17 years ago,” he says, grinning at the thought. “Before that, I was street racing in high school, but we don’t really count that.”

His first real car was a back-half truck, a rough but promising machine that put him in the old school back half class when it was still new. He ran it at Kennedale, at Cedar Creek, bouncing between small classes and local shootouts, learning the craft. Eventually, the truck gave way to a Firebird a car that, in Marc’s words, “just didn’t like me.” Every time he unloaded it, something broke, or he ended up “bumping it here or there.”

They weren’t catastrophic wrecks, just enough to sour the relationship. The last time it happened, Marc sold it wrecked. Ironically, that wasn’t the end of the Firebird’s story. David “Bird” Jones bought the car, fixed it, and turned it into one of the most recognizable white Firebirds ever seen on Street Outlaws. “He definitely made it do a lot better than I ever did,” Marc says, shaking his head with a laugh.

He purchased a dragster and bracket racing came next, briefly. It was organized, predictable, and if Marc is honest: boring. He gave it a fair shot and moved on. He tried, but his heart wasn’t in it. His attention was already shifting anyway, because his young son Rylan was starting his own journey. At just seven years old, Rylan was too small for anything but a junior dragster, but that was enough.

Those early days set the tone for everything the McClaskey's would become. Sundays at Cedar Creek became a family ritual: stopping for lunch on the way, laying out a picnic at the track, and spending the afternoon watching Rylan make passes in his junior. Danny would open the gates, and Rylan would spend hours running that little dragster up and down. "At that time, that was the only place he could legally drive, because he was only seven years old," Marc says. "It was pretty much just us out there, having fun, making memories."

The junior days shaped not just Rylan as a racer, but the entire McClaskey family as a racing family. From February through Thanksgiving, they were gone nearly every weekend, sometimes hitting three tracks in a row: Red Line on Friday night, Kennedale on Saturday, and Motorplex on Sunday. It became the rhythm of their lives. Marc remembers the culture of those days with fondness: the kids tearing around the pits on golf carts once the gates were locked, the parents circling up with cookouts, swapping stories, and looking out for each other's children. "It was like one big block party," Marc says. "Everybody was family. When the lights came on, it was serious. But in the staging lanes or in the pits, it was nothing but good times."

Rylan advanced step by step, moving through juniors 12.90, then 8.90, then 7.90. At fifteen, Marc and Kim bought him his first big car, a Pro Street ’67 Camaro. It was orange when they picked it up, but father and son immediately tore it down, repainted it blue, and upgraded the safety systems. Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons at Cedar Creek became test days, with Rylan making motor-only passes until his sixteenth birthday finally gave him clearance to run it wide open.

That transition also gave Marc the chance to climb back into a car of his own. “With juniors, it was a lot of work. We had to be in the staging lanes with him, tow him back, all that. With the big car, I could race too. He’d drive his, I’d drive mine, and Kim could stand with him if he needed anything.”

As Rylan grew into the Camaro, his racing evolved quickly. At sixteen and seventeen, he was already running index, bracket, and no-prep. By eighteen, the family decided to change the car over to radial racing, moving into TEX275 and Ultra Street. That’s where Rylan really began to make his mark winning championships, setting records, and showing that his years of junior racing had built a driver ready for the next level.

In the middle of all this, Marc dabbled in different projects. He sold his dragster and picked up a little Fox Body Mustang, nicknamed Leftovers because nearly every part on it was either a leftover from another car or something won in a raffle. “We painted it Mystic,” Marc says. “It was a fun car.” For a while, Rylan split time between the ’67 and the Mustang, running both in no time events. But as the no time world evolved, it evolved quickly. “No time has changed faster than anything I’ve ever seen,” Marc says. “Cars just weren’t competitive anymore.”

The Mustang was eventually sold. An ’02 Camaro came next, carrying them further into the small tire wars. But even that car had its own winding path eventually shipped overseas to Kuwait after its time in Texas was done. Each car represented a chapter, but all of them were leading somewhere bigger.

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Today, the McClaskey's find themselves with a car Marc never imagined he'd own: a Jeffers built C7 Corvette, powered by a screw blown Noonan Hemi. "It's something I never in my life thought we'd own," he says, still shaking his head in disbelief.

The switch from nitrous to a blown Hemi wasn't about chasing a new trend, it was survival. For years, the McClaskey's lived in the nitrous world, stacking five kits on a motor just to stay competitive. Every time they hauled the car back home, the teardown was automatic: everything gone through before it could ever go down the track again. It was grueling, but for a while it worked. "At first it wasn't that bad because we were right there in the hunt," Marc explains.

But the game changed. Screw blowers started showing up, rewriting what it took to be competitive in no-time racing. Nitrous combinations that had once been enough suddenly weren't even close. "With the no-time rules right now, as they stand, it just makes more sense," Marc says. "The nitrous motor was a lot of work, and now with all these screw blown Hemis and everything that's out there, it's just gotten crazy. With no rules except safety rules, the screw blowers are the way to go."

And for Marc, the irony is that the workload isn't much different than what they were already doing. "Everybody says, oh, you go screw blower, you don't know what you're in for. But we do. We were already refreshing rings and rods every 25 passes with the nitrous motor. That's the same maintenance on the screw blower. The only difference is now we've got a combination that can run with the field."

The Corvette itself became a labor of love, stitched together by some of the best in the sport. Jeffers went beyond the original plan, loading the car with titanium components the McClaskey's hadn't expected. David Vasser and Flo Supply supplied the plumbing and fittings, immaculate from end to end. Longtime family friend Kenny Hubbard handled the wiring, creating a layout that looked as much like artwork as it did electronics. "Everything on the car is immaculate," Marc says. "It looks like it belongs in a show. But it's built to be raced."

Safety was non-negotiable. Rylan was fitted to the car; a pour-in seat by DSP cradles him, Stroud parachutes hang off the back, a full onboard fire system stands ready.

"We didn't care about weight," Marc says. "We wanted every possible safety measure. Some people cut corners there we didn't."

Unlike earlier builds, which were constantly torn down and rebuilt, this Corvette feels complete. "We took what we liked out of every car we've had and put it all into this one," Marc says. "It's the perfect car."

Under the hood sits a 4.9 Noonan screw blown Hemi built by Jeff Naiser, backed by an M&M three speed 400 with lockup. In a twist, the McClaskey's even added nitrous; not for power, but to correct air quality in bad conditions. "A lot of people think nitrous means crazy power," Marc says. "But in bad air 2,500 or 3,000 DA you can spray a little into the blower hat. It cools the intake charge, and once the nitrous and air go in together, the screw blower mixes it and disperses it through the motor. Hot, thin air will kill the power of a blower, just like it does on turbos or ProCharger setups. That's why you see more and more teams spraying nitrous. We're doing the same thing, just with a screw blower. It's not about making extra horsepower, it's about keeping the motor consistent and correcting the air, every pass."

Heading into Big Jake's Southern N/T Nationals, the Corvette had only four test passes all focused-on safety. "We weren't trying to rotate the earth," Marc says. "We just wanted to make sure the brakes worked, the steering was right, the parachutes came out. That's all we were testing."

Balancing the excitement and the nerves isn't easy, especially with a brand-new car and a $200,000 purse on the line. But Marc insists they don't let the pressure run the show. "I love these races," he says. "I love the atmosphere; I love the people. That's what makes it worth doing. Sure, it's expensive and stressful, trying to get the car 100 percent and ready to go, but when you get to the track and see the excitement of the fans, people wanting to talk, just the overall energy it makes every bit of it worth it."

Even with that massive payout on the table, Marc refuses to let the money creep into their mindset. "We never go to a race looking at the amount we might win," he explains. "That just adds stress, and before you know it, everyone's on edge. We treat it the same as always: we're going out there to have fun, be with our family, cook out, sit around and BS between rounds once the car is ready. If we win something, great. If we don't, that's fine too. The most important thing is having that family time and enjoying it together."

When asked if he sees the new Corvette staying in no-time or eventually moving into another class, Marc doesn't hesitate. "Right now, we're just going to stay in no-time," he says. "It's so big around here and close to home that we can race once a month and never be more than an hour away. For now, we'll wait and see how it goes. We do plan on doing a little traveling next year, but this year it's all about getting past Jake's race and seeing where we stand."

Their crew is as small and tight knit as it gets. "It's me, my wife, and Michaela we're the crew," Marc says. "Kenny and Little Kenny jump in when they see us behind." Around them is a circle of sponsors and supporters who make it possible: Nitrous Outlet, Flo Supply, Naiser Racing, Kenny Hubbard, Phils Trailer Sales, Neal Chance Converters, Menscer Motorsports, FuelTech, TBM Brakes, and Larry Jeffers Race Cars. "It takes everybody," Marc says. "We couldn't do it without them."

And while the cars and sponsors matter, the lessons matter more. Marc's advice to other racing dads chasing dreams with their kids is simple: perspective. "Don't make it hard on the kids," he says. "Most of the time, they're already hard enough on themselves. They don't need more stress. Let them enjoy it. Have family time. Remember that it's a sport it's not a job."

And when asked what he hopes Rylan carries with him long after the trophies and wins, Marc doesn't talk about numbers. "I hope he learns how to take something to the next level," he says. "And be dedicated to what you do."

Away from the track, the McClaskey's stay busy with their businesses. Marc has owned Lakeside Collision repair shop in Mabank, Texas, for 22 years, focusing on insurance work and collision work with the occasional hot rod project sprinkled in. Rylan, meanwhile, runs RPM Auto Enhancements in Mabank, offering glass work, window tint, wheels, tires, lift and lowering kits, all your auto accessory needs and most recently, vinyl wraps and paint protection film. After outgrowing space in Marc's shop, he moved into his own building earlier this year. "It's neat watching your kids build something and grow," Marc says.

At just 20 something, Rylan has already stacked up 3 TEX275 championships, wins at Duck's races, and a spot on Drag Illustrated's 30 Under 30.

His story is still just beginning, but it's built on a foundation most racers never get: a father who knew when to push, when to step back, and how to make sure racing never cost more than it gave.

For fans who want to keep up with the McClaskey's on the track or in the shop you can follow their journey online. Rylan shares racing highlights, shop updates, and behind-the-scenes content from his personal page and business page-RPM Auto Enhancements. Marc keeps fans in the loop with updates from the family's race program and his collision repair shop through his Facebook page.

Editor's Note:

Some stories are about the past. Others are still being written. The McClaskey's are right in the middle of theirs. For more than fifteen years, Marc McClaskey has been chasing this sport through back half trucks, stubborn Firebirds, raffle-built Mustangs, and even a Camaro that ended up overseas. Alongside him, his son Rylan has grown from a seven-year-old in a junior dragster at Cedar Creek into a multi-time TEX275 champion with a brand-new Jeffers built Corvette at his command.

That Corvette, with its screw blown Noonan Hemi and titanium laced craftsmanship, is their boldest chapter yet. And this weekend, it will roll under the lights at Xtreme Raceway Park for Big Jake Promotions' Southern N/T Nationals, where $200,000 is on the line.

The McClaskey's aren't the type to focus on dollar signs they've learned the hard way that money can steal the joy. For them, racing is still about family cookouts in the pits, late-night laughs with friends, and building memories that outlast any timeslip. But make no mistake: when the bulbs drop, they'll be ready.
So, if you want to see what grassroots racing looks like at its very best raw, unpredictable, and carrying the weight of six figures...make plans to be at XRP this weekend. Watch the McClaskey's take their shot. Cheer them on. Be part of the story as it's happening.

Because this one isn't finished yet.

Milissa Martini, The Fast Lane Collective

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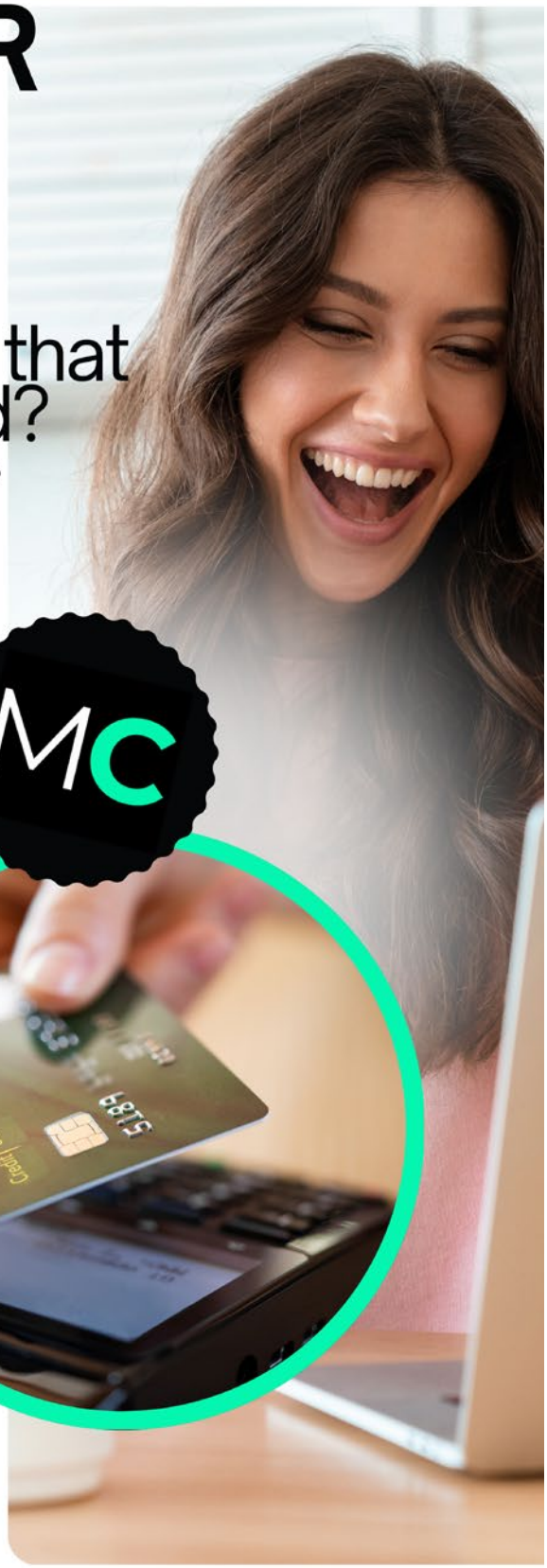

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TROUS OUTLET

Meet Nicolas Russo

A creative whose path wound through modeling, wrenching on cars, and an accident that would redefine how he saw the world.

I don't usually share this," he admits. "But the reason I stopped modeling and started creating for others is because I lost the vision in my right eye. A screwdriver went through it while I was working on a car."

That moment marked a turning point. Modeling was behind him, and creation was ahead. "I live by 'everything happens for a reason,'" Nicolas says. "It was my sign that change was needed. It forced me to wake up and see things literally in a different perspective."

The shift felt natural. He had always loved cars. Building them, showing them off, standing in awe when someone photographed his first build at a car show. "I wanted more of that," he recalls. "I already had this passion for cars, so stepping into cameras and production was just a way to merge the two."

At first, he stuck to car shows classics, antiques, and restorations. "I'm a classics guy," he says. "That's always been my taste." He started shooting when he was just 16 or 17, a high school sophomore, and now at 29 he's got more than a decade of experience behind the lens.

But eventually, shows weren't enough. He wanted the speed, the smoke, the chaos of racing. "My stepping stones into racing came through events like Formula Drift when the circuit came through," Nicolas says. "And of course, Bradenton my home track was always part of the picture."

The real breakthrough, though, came from an unexpected call. "Honestly, I've got to credit a big part of my drag racing entry to Justin Swanstrom. He brought me into the Street Outlaws show about four or five years ago," he explains. "Jumping in that deep was eye-opening the fans, the feeling, the family atmosphere. I really think I came in at the peak of it. The morale, the family aspect it was at the highest point, at least from what I got to experience during those three years I was part of it."

When Nicolas first started, he was shooting specifically for Justin. "Behind the scenes, his clips, his story while he was on Street Outlaws that's how it all started," he says. The connection came through Instagram. "He found me there. Just social media it's crazy how simple it was."

But while the opportunity pulled him in, his family wasn't so quick to celebrate. "My uncle raced top fuel back in the day, and he had some horror stories he broke his back. Safety wasn't really a thing then. So, in my family, racing was kind of shunned. I was the only one who ever turned a wrench. My grandfather collected cars, which sparked my interest, but nobody else built or raced them."

Still, the passion stuck. He eased his way in, showing his family that the sport had grown, that safety had changed, that it wasn't the same danger they remembered. "Even years later, when I showed them the Street Outlaws episodes I worked on, they were shocked. They couldn't believe it was real. But to me, it wasn't about attention. I didn't care about that. What I loved was telling people's stories. That's what hooked me."

Storytelling became the foundation of Nicolas's career. "Honestly, I used to hate video," he admits with a laugh. "I never thought I'd be

doing it like I am today. But now I'd grab a video camera before I'd grab a photo camera, because video lets me tell a story in ways a still image never could. Every client, every person, every project it's a brand-new story every time."

That commitment to authenticity has shaped the way he works. "I don't just show up and start shooting. I make people tell me about themselves first. I want to understand them, so the story I tell represents who they are. And at the end of the day, being genuine that's what will take you further in this industry than anything else."

It's a principle he shared while speaking at Sema. "I don't follow trends. I don't do fads. I've never been the guy to hop on a bandwagon just because it's popular. If I do it, it's only to prove it can be done. But that's not what creativity is about. A camera is a tool. It's supposed to help you create something that's yours."

Ask Nicolas where his favorite place on the track is, and he doesn't hesitate. It's not the starting line or the finish line it's the staging lanes. "That's where you capture the little moments in between," he says. "I call them '1320 moments.' It's when you catch a fan interaction, a kid laughing, something funny or silly. It's where you see the human side of racing, not just the cars. Those moments mean the most to me."

Fans often miss it. They're in the stands watching tractors drag the track, not realizing that only a few feet away, the real stories are unfolding. "Some of my best car shots have come from staging, too," he adds. "And depending on the track, the light can be unreal. Bradenton has beautiful sunsets but XRP? The light there is something else. The way the sun hits, it's just beautiful."

When it comes to his work, Nicolas doesn't hide behind presets or shortcuts. "I like color exaggeration. I like background separation. I want the subject to stand on its own with depth. But every edit is different. I don't click a preset and lay it on everything. Every single image is a fresh edit based on that moment and how it feels to me while I'm working on it."

That means no two events look the same. "Most races are multi-day, so I'll end up with three or four different edit styles within one event. The light changes, the weather shifts, the moments are different. I edit to fit the story I'm trying to tell, not the other way around."

Three or four days at the track is no easy grind, but Nicolas has dialed in a system that keeps him versatile. "For video, I run a Sony A7SIII, and for photos I use the A7IV. I like having options: zooms, wide shots, tighter shots. I don't want an album to look repetitive. I want you to scroll through and feel like you were there. Honestly, I want you to regret not being there. I want you to look at it and say, 'Dang, I should've gone. I can't miss the next one.'"

That, to him, is the mission turning coverage into inspiration. But in Florida, where the creator scene has exploded, he admits the landscape has changed. "It feels like everybody has a camera now, especially at car shows. I hope I can still inspire people, but creators create differently now."

Still, his work carries a signature look, and he's proud of that. And when it comes to unforgettable events, one stands out immediately. "This year I went to Shadyside for the first time," he says. "That track was incredible different altitudes, unique layouts. Most tracks are flat, so your options are limited unless you get in the stands or fly a drone. But Shadyside gave me so much variety. It felt like down home racing. I loved it."

But he admits that memory might soon be replaced. "I've got a feeling Jake's event is going to top it. His first event was awesome, but from what I've heard, the one coming up is going to be on another level.

Honestly, the reason Jake and I even connected in the first place was because of photos from his

last one. I saw the shots online and thought, 'Why aren't there more? Why isn't this everywhere?' I reached out to him that same day and said, 'If you're putting on something like this, it deserves more exposure. How can I help?' And that's how we started talking."

He's been on board ever since.

For Nicolas, it's all about reading people and translating their unspoken vision into something tangible. "If I can just gauge a couple of your interests, or even the kind of cars you like and the colors you wear, I can usually design something that fits you perfectly. It's all in my head I just need a few clues. That's the gift. It's just storytelling, really."

It's a skill he didn't only sharpen through creative work, but also through his day job. Outside the track, Nicolas works in research oncology. "I've had to learn to read people really well," he says. "When you're working with stage four cancer patients in clinical trials, some of them will do anything to stay on the study, even lie. It sounds harsh, but it's true. So reading people became second nature to me. And in the long run, it's helped me in every part of life, including my creative work."

These days, he's transitioned into a remote role as a budget analyst for a research oncology company less direct patient interaction, more numbers and data. But the weight of those experiences stays with him. "It's sad," he says quietly. "Cancer's taken people in my own family too. That word it's heavy. But I also know how important the research is. Every trial, every study, it's a chance to give people more time."

Ask Nicolas what separates a good motorsports content creator from a great one, and he doesn't talk about gear or editing tricks. He talks about humility. "A good learner and a good listener that's what really makes the difference," he says. "If you're willing to take criticism, take feedback, and surround yourself with people you can bounce ideas off of, you'll go further. The ones who can't handle feedback? They stay stuck. If nobody ever tells you to change or try something new, you never grow."

It's advice he lives by, and one he shares often. Because while he's known for long form storytelling, Nicolas understands the pull of quick, viral content too. "Short form isn't going anywhere for a while," he admits. "But everything runs in cycles. Eventually, people are going to crave longer stories again. Attention spans are short now, but we're all creatures of habit. It'll swing back."

When he's mentoring new creators, he keeps it simple. "My best advice? Go out and try. Be willing to fail. Because you will just like with any art form. But keep at it. That's the only way you learn."

The same mindset applies to event promotion, where Nicolas has become a trusted voice. "There are

two sides to marketing a race," he explains. "The long game, and then the crunch time when the event is right around the corner. Both matter. I've seen promoters just rely on big names to push their show, and it doesn't always work. You've got to do more than that you've got to make every racer, every fan, feel like they matter. When people feel valued, they'll promote it themselves. That's when you get the real turnout."

It's why Jake's event left such a mark on him. "The first time I went, it just felt like home again. I was around people I hadn't seen in years, and we picked up right where we left off. That's rare in this industry, and that's why it hooked me so hard. I can't wait to go back."

And while he's built a career behind the camera, Nicolas hasn't forgotten what it felt like to be the new kid, chasing shots with nothing but curiosity. "I don't believe in gatekeeping," he says firmly. "I had to fight through that when I was starting out, and I promised myself I wouldn't do it to anyone else."

At a race earlier this year, he spotted a teenager next to him snapping photos on a phone. Nicolas set down his video camera and started showing the kid how to frame better shots. "He couldn't believe I stopped to help him," Nicolas says. "But I told him, 'What you just did is exactly why I picked up my first camera. If you love this, I'll help you.' Moments like that mean everything. Full circle."

Even as his career expands balancing work at the track with corporate projects, and planning trips to events like SEMA his mission stays the same: to create, to mentor, and to tell stories that matter. "Anybody can reach out," he says. "My socials, my website, even my number. I keep everything open. I want to provide for events, but I also want to teach people. Because at the end of the day, it's not about holding onto secrets. It's about building something bigger than yourself."

As much as Nicolas loves creating, his vision now stretches beyond his own work. "Honestly, my main goal this year is youth involvement," he says. "Whether it's in racing, media, or just getting them around the sport, that's what I'm chasing. I've been reaching for leadership opportunities because I want to make a difference."

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If there's a thread...

Running through Nicolas's journey, it's that he never shied away from the unknown.

It isn't easy. "Sometimes it feels like a maze you're going, pushing, and suddenly you hit a dead end. That's the hardest part. But I believe the only way to really succeed is to bring it to kids where they already are. If you can pull schools into it, create traveling events, show it to them right in front of their faces that's when it clicks. You can't force kids to care, but you can give them opportunities to fall in love with it."

The challenge, of course, is bigger than one person. Tracks are closing, major programs are scaling back, and opportunities are shrinking. "Even Formula Drift cut down on a lot of their stops. And within the last year, we've lost so many tracks. It's cornering us, making it harder to get people back in the stands," he says. "That's why I try to shine a light on it. It's not just my problem it's everyone's problem."

But he keeps his hope grounded in the small, unforgettable moments that keep the sport alive. He recalls the words of a friend who runs car shows: I host these so people don't remember the other 29 days of the month. "That stuck with me," Nicolas says. "Because it's true. When I go to these events, the rest of the days don't matter. For a lot of people, this is their one escape. Their one pure joy."

It's why he never says no when a fan hands him a phone at the track. "Those moments matter. Maybe it's a kid's first picture with a car. Maybe it's what makes them want to cross to the other side of the fence someday. I'll always stop for that."

Nicolas's story his resilience, his passion hasn't always been visible. But he's starting to share it more, piece by piece. "A lot of people don't know I'm blind in my right eye," he says. "Some of the Street Outlaws guys know, because it happened during that time. But not everyone. It started with the screwdriver accident, and then later, during COVID, I had a sinus infection that detached my retina. I'd had corrective surgery and was able to see again, but then I lost it. Just like that."

He pauses for a moment, then continues with the calm perspective that's guided him through so much. "Everything happens for a reason. I believe that. "

"Some of the most pivotal moments in my career came from being uncomfortable," he says. "Putting myself in situations where I wasn't experienced, where I didn't know what I was doing. Every single time I felt nervous, scared, or unsure and still jumped in it opened doors to experiences I never would have had otherwise."

It's the piece of advice he carries for anyone looking to step into creative work, racing, or even life itself: make yourself uncomfortable.

"Growth doesn't happen when you're sitting safe in your corner," he explains. "It happens when you stretch yourself, when you take risks, when you're willing to feel awkward or out of place. That's when you find out what you're capable of."

He smiles, repeating the words of a mentor that stuck with him: "*Get comfortable being uncomfortable. That's when you get dangerous.*"

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Outlaw Armageddon 10 Recap

Each year, OA puts together a private media group to coordinate coverage. This time, organizer Dinger asked photographers and videographers not just to shoot the cars, but to capture the in between moments...crew banter, staging lane nerves, track prep, and even each other. By the end of the weekend, what began as a Messenger thread became some of the most human, behind-the-scenes content OA has ever seen.

What started as a simple idea in a Facebook comment turned into one of the most memorable Jr. Dragster races in years. Kayla and Boosted stepped up to organize a 16-car Cash Days on Saturday morning with more than $3,000 in purse and prizes. Donations poured in from OG Armageddon racers, including Chase who added $700 from his own Small Tire winnings. The kids put on a show that had the crowd buzzing, proving once again that OA invests in the next generation.

Michael Poland, Jimmy Dale, and Woo Barrett Green brought two fan-favorite classes:Lil' Gangsters and Cheap Street to OA10. 54 Lil G's and 20 Cheap Street cars turned Tulsa Raceway Park into a festival of small-tire grudge matches and side bets.

Saturday wrapped a weekend of blood, sweat, and tears. The TRP crew worked tirelessly on track prep and safety, while OA staff kept the show moving with signature efficiency. Racers, crews, and fans came together for what felt less like an event and more like a family reunion.

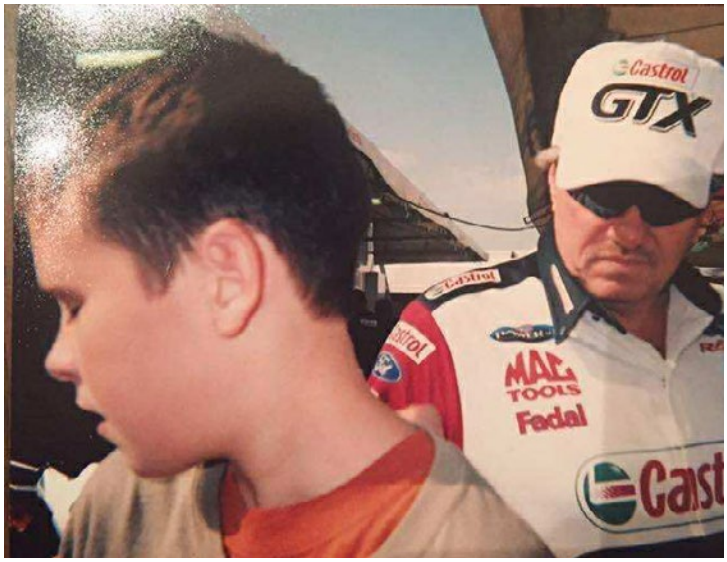
At only 16 years old, Kenzie Pierce stole the spotlight with hand built trophies that had winners reaching for them before their checks. Her trophies became instant collectibles...proof that OA is as much about legacy as it is about horsepower.

Outlaw Armageddon 10 was more than just racing. It was about kids getting their shot, media people becoming friends, hand-built trophies over prize money, and racers risking it all in Tulsa under the lights. OA Nation showed up, and OA Nation delivered.

POLAND

From a junior-dragster kid in Graham, Texas red lighting his first 15 passes to co-creating a class that fills ladders from Shadyside to California, Michael Poland didn't just come back to racing... He helped reshape it.

And the next three months? They look like the fastest yet.



Michael Poland was born into speed. Even his name carried it. “I was named after my uncle,” he said. “He was known for making shit fast. Didn’t matter what it was he’d tinker with it until it was quick.”

When his mom started dating the man who would become his stepdad, Michael was seven or eight years old. His stepdad raced a quirky Corvette-Vega wagon hybrid in index classes. On Michael’s second or third trip to the track, he spotted a junior dragster. He was hooked. “Within 48 to 72 hours, I had my grandma convinced to buy me one,” he said.

The early lessons weren’t easy. “I went red my first 15 passes,” he admitted. But soon he found his stride. At Wichita Raceway Park, he entered a junior shootout with 20 or 30 opponets. Against kids whose cars were plastered with victory stickers, Michael won his first one. The prize was a silver decal with green letters reading Money Winner. “At seven or eight years old, you couldn’t tell me shit,” he said. “That sticker made me feel like I was part of the club.”

The run ended not because of talent but because of height. By the time Michael hit junior high, he was already 6’3” or 6’4”. His joints couldn’t keep pace with his bones.

“It was like a baby deer when it’s born,” he said. “My body just wasn’t keeping up. Some mornings I couldn’t even walk.” His parents spent thousands extending the cage and moving pedals, but eventually, it wasn’t safe. He was too tall for juniors and too young for a door car.

Racing faded. Life was filled with sports and friends in Graham, Texas; a town small enough to cross in under four minutes. “The biggest thing was the Walmart Supercenter,” he said. “They just got a Starbucks and the whole town lost its mind.” He admits he was like most teenagers there: “Just out doing dumb shit.”

He graduated early, worked in the oil fields, and stayed a fan from the sidelines, keeping up with videos and street racing clips. He lived in Austin for a time, managing operations for American Airlines, and watched as the sport evolved from afar.

Then 2020 hit. The pandemic shut the world down. American Airlines laid off younger staff. At the same time, Michael’s dad was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Rent in Austin skyrocketed. Michael packed up and went home.

That’s when racing came back.

He drove his dad to treatments, and the conversations always circled back to cars. His parents’ ’31 and ’32 Ford Model A’s were still regulars on the car show circuit. The smell of fuel, the sound of engines, the memories of his junior dragster days it all came rushing back. “It kind of just crept in,” Michael said. “Before long it was part of my life again.”

Nights were spent at Winder’s Automotive, Graham’s biggest shop, where his friend Mike Winder was tinkering with a small-tire S10. At first, it was just test and tunes at Wichita Falls. Michael pushed

Photo Credit:
Top- Kaitlyn Ward Bottom: Unknown

Photo Credit: Starting from top left and going counterclockwise.
Milissa Martini, Unknown, Auto Focus DFW, LV Auto Photography, Auto Focus DFW

him to try the streets. The first time out, Winder was hooked. That spark lit a fire, but soon after, Winder began making upgrades to the truck and stepping it up piece by piece for bigger challenges. Since it wasn't out at the track as much anymore, Michael started racing with Tom.

The two had already been close outside of racing; they'd built a business partnership together and now that connection carried over into the lanes. Tom's black and silver Mustang, Magic, was a regular sight at local races, and Michael was right there with him. They started racing together full-time, splitting duties as partners on and off the track. And it was during this stretch that the post went up...the one that changed everything.

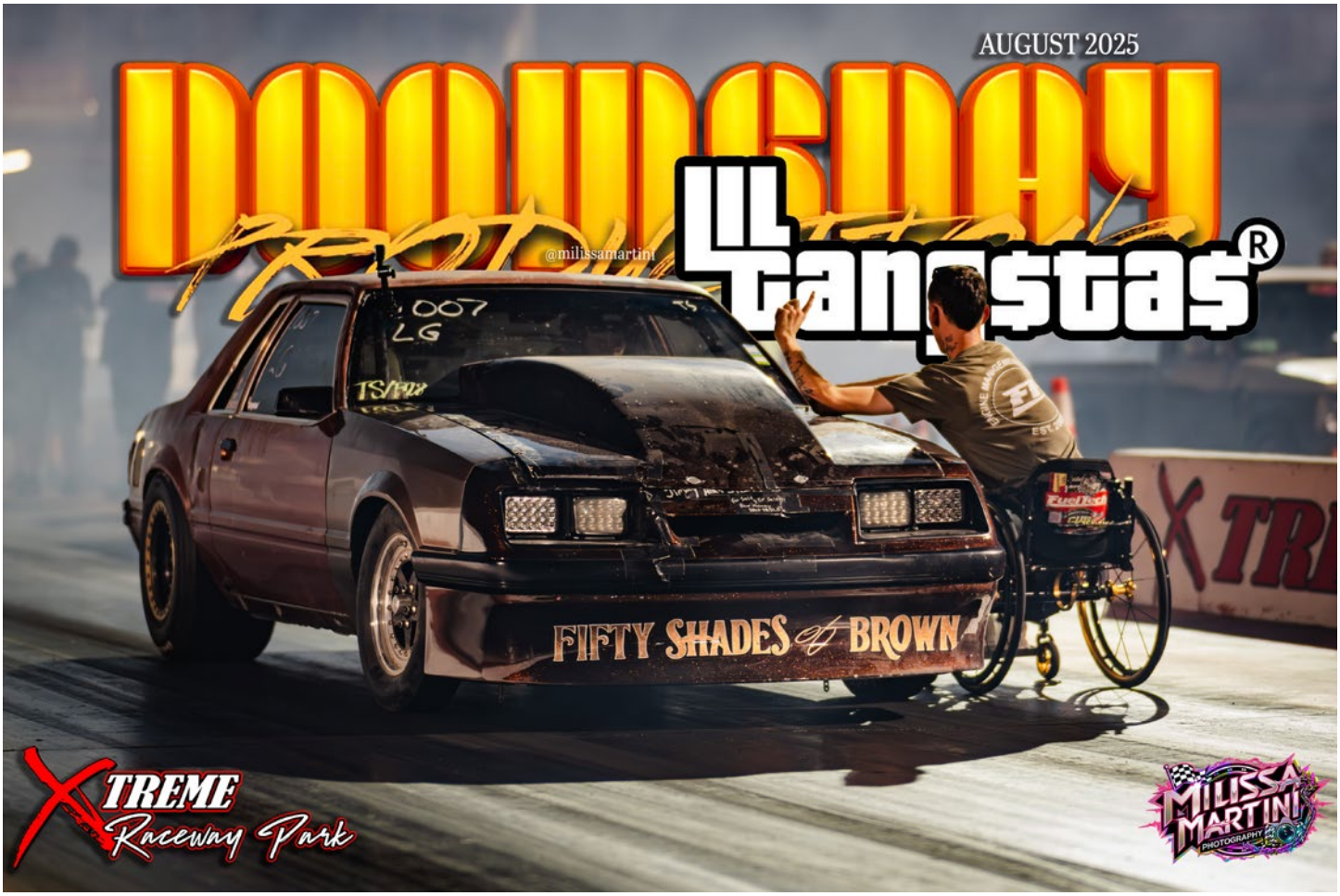
Tom threw up a casual photo of a plate of food with the caption: All my buddies are headed to Vegas for Fastest in America. Anybody need a chef? It was meant as a joke. Within an hour, organizer Sherry Beth called. Her team didn't need a chef but they did need another car.

Tom was in, but there was a catch: he couldn't afford to do it alone. So he picked up the phone and started calling Michael, JoJo, and Raska- they were all in the same boat. Nobody had the money to swing a month long trip to Vegas on their own. But together? Maybe. One by one, they agreed to pitch in whatever they could. It wasn't much, but pooled together, it was enough to make it happen.

The call came at 10 p.m. By 5 a.m., they were on the highway to Nevada, chasing a shot they never thought they'd get. For the next thirty-some days, they lived and breathed JJ Da Boss's Fastest in America. Filming was nonstop two or three nights straight, one night off, then right back at it. Tom even made a detour in Oklahoma to film with the Street Outlaws crew before rolling into Vegas.

Somewhere in the middle of it all, Tom picked up a new identity. The crew was standing around when Kye Kelley joked that Tom didn't look like a Tom. "He looks more like a Joe," Kye said. Smoke quickly jumped in: "No, he looks more like a Jimmy Dale." The name stuck instantly. Before long, the crew, the racers, even the cameras were calling him Jimmy Dale. What started as an offhand comment in Vegas became the nickname that would follow him everywhere.

It was grueling. It was sleepless. It was far from glamorous. But it was electric.



When the month-long whirlwind ended, the crew came home without a clear plan just a burning question: how do we make this a living?

The answer was Small Tire Gangsters.

The idea was bold: host one massive event each year, pour in every resource, and use the profit to travel to bucket-list races like War in the Woods and Shadyside. Just as important, don't box it into one type of racing. "With Small Tire Gangsters, you show up and the track is what it is," Michael explained. "Maybe it's sticky, maybe it's not. You get what you get."

They brought in a third partner, graphic designer Cody Sprague, to handle flyers, sponsorship proposals, and all things visual. Meanwhile, Tom launched YouTube, after encouragement from the Street Racing Channel crew. Almost overnight, the channel had tens of thousands of subscribers. "It just fell into place," Michael said. Between their followings, they had access to nearly 50,000 fans. Michael ran the numbers: "If even one percent show up at Yellow Belly, it's a success."

Their debut event *The Gut Edition* proved him right. Friday night was True Street under the old rules. Saturday they introduced Lil Gangstas, their new class, and threw an extra $5,000 into the pot.

At the driver's meeting, Tom handed Michael a stack of papers. Front and back, two pages stapled together, filled with names. 77 cars had entered. For a first event, it was unheard of. The payout climbed to around $22,000 to win, and Michael Hollis claimed the victory. "Perfect first winner," Michael said. "He's been an ambassador ever since."

That was the birth of Lil Gangstas.

Word spread. A class critics dismissed as "just index" had pulled more cars than some national events. The success forced Michael and Tom to set systems in place. Rules stayed simple and consistent. Disputes were handled by a three-person committee Michael, Barrett Green, and a rotating third voice like Gaylen Smith, John Sears etc.. Since Tom was behind the wheel in Lil Gangstas, he stayed out of the decision-making. That separation kept the process fair and the racers confident in the calls..

Soon, other promoters wanted in. Shannon Morgan, Barrett, Hollis, Big Mark in Oklahoma, and more added Lil Gangstas to their cards, with Michael's team often helping run it. But when some promoters started using the class to profit off racers, they made it official: trademarks, copyrights, and an LLC. "We built something, and I wasn't going to let people run it into the ground," Michael said.

That protection opened doors. Wes Buck invited Lil Gangstas to the World Series of Pro Mod, streamed on FloRacing. With 57 cars entered, it was a breakout moment. Fans watched wild wheelstands and side-by-side action. Tom won his first ever Lil Gangstas and celebrated with beers in the winner's circle.

Photo Credit: Scott Witty

California followed, with more than 60 cars entering. "People told us, 'We've never had anything like this,'" Michael said. Many of those racers now travel the country chasing Lil Gangstas.

Now the spotlight turns to Jake's at Xtreme Raceway Park.

Jake's is capped at 32 cars, $500 buy-in with $9,000 added for $25,000 to win. The limit isn't about exclusivity it's about logistics, Michael explained. With 164 drivers asking for spots, choosing 32 was brutal. "A lot of those racers I know well," he said. "Friends. People who deserve a shot. But there's only so much room."

The hype is undeniable. Thursday night brings the chip draw during a $15,000 practice-tree shootout. Friday night is Bear Shit Only classes only- no test and tune, just the fastest cars in the country. Between Lil Gangstas rounds, more heavy hitters roll out. "From a spectator's point of view, it's wall-to-wall racing," Michael said.

And after Jake's? The pace only gets faster.

Outlaw Armageddon in Tulsa, expected to draw 80–100 cars.. Cecil County in Maryland with Pro Stock Gordo for a 64-car, $20,000 to win show. Ice Cream Cruise with 1320. Swanfest with Justin Swanstrom at Rockingham. No Mercy. Nashville. "I don't have a weekend off for three months," Michael said.

It's exhausting, but he never forgets how far he's come. "There were days I prayed to race for a living," he said. "Now I'm doing it. I'm tired 24/7 but I get to live the dream."

From a kid red lighting in a junior dragster to co-creator of one of the most exciting grassroots classes in the country, Michael Poland has lived the story of a racer who came back, built something new, and helped reshape small-tire racing in America.

And if the next three months are any indication, he's just getting started.

Hood 2 Hood Racing: What's In A Name

The Ethan Williams story and how a quiet Dallas racer built a family that races together, prays together, eats together, and shows up for each other, twelve years and counting.

When you talk to Ethan Williams, racing doesn't just sound like a sport. It sounds like a place to belong. He'll tell you it was in his blood long before he knew the details. His father raced, though the two weren't close when Ethan was young. He fell for the track on his own terms, week after week, long before the reunion. Then, later in life, father and son found each other again and discovered they'd been carrying the same fire all along. "Once me and my dad reconnected, it just clicked," Ethan says. "We realized we had the same passion, the same love for racing. From there, we got closer and closer, right up until he passed."

That sense of inheritance something you feel before you can name it shaped how Ethan thinks about community. In the early days, it bothered him that racing had a weekly heartbeat but a six day silence. Sunday under the lights, and then nothing until the next Sunday. He wanted a way to keep the conversation alive: a place to check on each other midweek, line up a lock-in, swap parts, pray for somebody's mom, find a missing axle, start a rivalry, end a beef. He wanted, simply, to keep people connected.

That idea turned into a name. Watching Dallas roll in by neighborhoods: West Dallas, North Dallas, East Dallas, South Dallas, Oak Cliff... Ethan noticed the way hometowns traveled with

racers. Crews parked by crews. School buddies found each other at the fence. “Everybody’s coming from different places, but here they are, together,” he says. He wanted a banner that honored that reality without dividing it. He called it Hood 2 Hood Racing.

At first, he worried the name would scare people off. Hood can be misunderstood: some hear a stereotype, not a neighborhood. So, Ethan wrote a mission statement to explain what the name really meant.

Hood 2 Hood Racing’s mission is to reach racers of all ethnicities and racing styles; it creates a diverse and inclusive racing environment that is open to all categories of racing. H2HR is a platform where the world can enjoy head-to-head drag racing in different cities, states and countries. The purpose of the organization is to highlight all racers. Everyone is welcomed in the HOOD!

The phrase carried three meanings at once. First, “hood-to-hood” echoed “head-to-head” racing. Second, it literally pointed to “what’s under your hood” the work, the build, the engine. And third, it spoke to what’s beneath the surface as a person: your character, your drive, what fuels you beyond the car. All three ideas stack together, turning the name into a symbol of unity through competition.

Before the group, the scene already had camaraderie, but it was segmented. One camp over here, another over there, and not much crosstalk. Hood 2 Hood Racing changed the wiring. It gave people a reason to meet in the middle, a common table to eat at, a public square to argue in, and a backyard to celebrate. “Even though they were still competitive, some of them started turning into family,” Ethan says. “Racing became my baby,” he says. “Every picnic feels like a family reunion.”

The group launched in November 2013, and by the following year Ethan wanted to turn the online energy into a real-life gathering. “We tried to have our first picnic in 2014, but the weather promptly tested the vision,” he recalled. It poured rain. Ethan had already bought and prepared all the food and didn’t want it to go to waste. He called Mr. Danny at Cedar Creek Dragway and asked if they could at least meet under the pavilion.

“We couldn’t race, but we weren’t going to waste what we’d prepared,” Ethan said. So, they gathered anyway ate together, swapped stories, shook hands, and made plans.

By 2016, a clear Sunday finally arrived, and the picnic itself hit its stride but even apart from the picnic, the online group was exploding. Membership kept climbing, and what began as a small communication hub now powered a statewide racing network. It still felt both new and inevitable at the same time: call-outs firing in the comments, lock-ins sealed with handshakes, pop-up shootouts, and local tracks buoyed by a crowd that finally had its own coordination center.

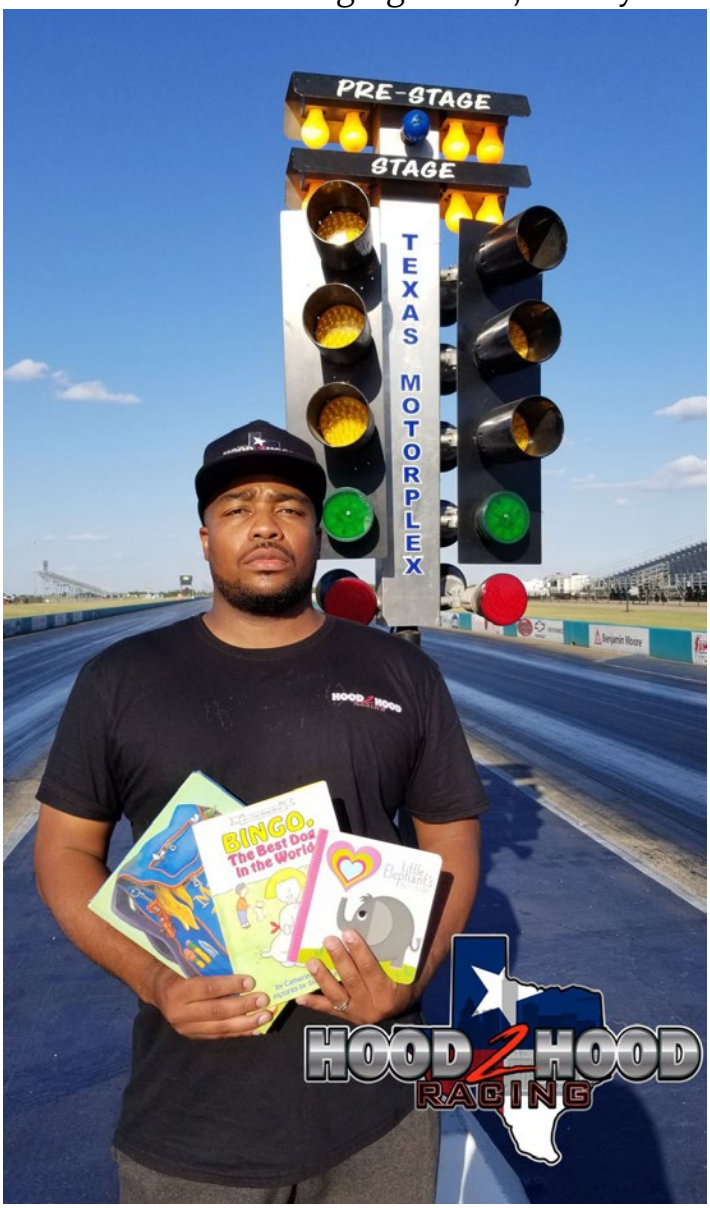
What once took three phone calls or a friend-of a friend connection could now happen with a single post. Need a part by Friday? Need a rival by Saturday? Need a prayer today? Post it to the group 33,000 eyes might see it before nightfall.

The group’s impact showed up in ways that had nothing to do with time slips.

Randy Willis noticed noticed his neighbors roof collapsing; John Herring who owns STAR 1 Roofing and Contracting stepped up and donated the roof, keeping the city from condemning the home. Over multiple holidays, racers gathered clothes and food and spent Thanksgiving or Christmas serving meals downtown ministering, listening, handing out jackets that may have smelled faintly of race fuel and fresh laundry. In Oak Cliff, a woman’s porch rotted but Brandon Weddle with NexLevel Roofing and Outdoor Living demolished the old one and built a new one from the ground up.

There were quiet collections for racers in hospital rooms; parts runs for cars wrecked in testing; GoFundMe’s shared, debts forgiven, beefs put down. “That’s always what I liked the most,” Ethan says. “It helped people.”

He tried to make it generational, too. Hood-2-Books offered kids rewards for pages read, with book-drive discounts at race entries and plans to donate those books back to inner-city schools. The program launched right before COVID and got interrupted, but he's not done with it. "I'm bringing it back," he says.



If the picnic is the family reunion, the classes are the family talent show... everybody gets a lane. Ethan builds the card to reflect the group: 7.0 index cars, junior dragsters, small tire, big rim, JV and a fast-growing Power Wheels class for the kids that is, frankly, more serious than adults expect. "Those kids, man they're about it," he laughs.

The philosophy is simple: no one should feel like they don't belong. "I don't want somebody thinking their car ain't fast enough, so they can't come," Ethan says. "I try to make sure there's something for everybody. That's the group." That inclusivity isn't always the easiest way to run a program tight schedules don't love extra classes but it's the honest reflection of who Hood 2 Hood Racing is.

Fans see race day but they don't see the giant chart that lives in Ethan's head. Lanes to assign. Call-outs to slot. Classes to pace so the show doesn't bottleneck. The free food window 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. to plan and serve on time while staying inside the track's rules. The personalities to manage when engines won't idle and the tempers to cool when a heat index hits triple digits.

The nights run late. "One year I lined up cars, sat down in the pits Indian-style, and fell asleep," he laughs. "By the end of the night, I'm gone." Fridays can run to four in the morning; Saturdays, sometimes six or seven.

Ask him how he planned this whole thing and he'll shrug. "A lot of people set goals, make game plans, action plans," he says. "I didn't do none of it. I think that's why it's so successful. It's genuine. You bless others, and God blesses you in return." He's not the archetype of the social-media promoter: no taste for politics, no hunger for the spotlight. He calls himself quiet. He prefers the work. He believes there's purpose in it. "God has a purpose for me," he says. "I think it's bringing people together."

Sponsorship is part of the work, and it's not as glamorous as it looks from the stands. The group isn't monetized: Hood 2 Hood Racing started back in 2013, before platforms flipped the switches and a lot of what people assume is "easy money" is just a promoter juggling receipts. Over the years, local partners and friends have shouldered the picnic. There are levels for anyone who wants in because not everyone has ten grand lying around. "There's a way to be involved," he says.

There have been doors closed, too. Ethan talks plainly about sending professional proposals to big-name brands, following the playbook, and still getting dismissed on stereotype alone. Ethan says, not angry just tired. “People don’t see the charity work, the community support, the way grassroots racing keeps tracks alive every weekend.” He pauses. “I don’t play politics. I’ve never been that person to sit at the big lunch table. Sometimes that gets you overlooked. People say, ‘Why him?’ I just keep going.”

If you want to understand what he means by keeping tracks alive, look at the Sunday faithful cars. They may be a little rough around the edges but they set their gate money aside like a light bill, week after week. Big events come and go. The grassroots racers keep the gates swinging. “They’re the backbone,” Ethan says. “They’re the reason these places still open on the weekend.” His mouth twists into a half-grin. “That passion gets me in trouble sometimes. I don’t know how to play the game. I don’t care to. If I can do it, I’ll do it. If I can’t, I can’t. But I’ll be honest about it.”

Honesty is also his first rule for promoters. Don’t promise what you can’t deliver especially payouts. “That’s the curse,” he says. “Racers break parts, drive an hour to the parts store, spend their last dollar getting back in the lanes. At the end, what you promised better be there.” Be straight about the classes. Be straight about the schedule. If you mess up, own it. The culture is more honorable than outsiders think. “In grudge racing, you lock something in on a handshake, 95% of the time people stick to it,” he says. “You’ll always hear the 5% stories. But the truth is better than the rumor.”

Twelve years in, the truth is that Hood 2 Hood Racing has outgrown its founder’s comfort with the spotlight. What started with ten friends posting jokes and videos snowballed into a statewide commons that helped more than a few promoters and businesses find their first audiences, even if not all of them remember to give credit. Ethan doesn’t keep score. He only asks for decency. “A lot of people don’t want money or recognition,” he says. “They just want to be appreciated. A simple ‘thank you’ goes a long way. I tell my kids that. If somebody helps you, say thank you.”

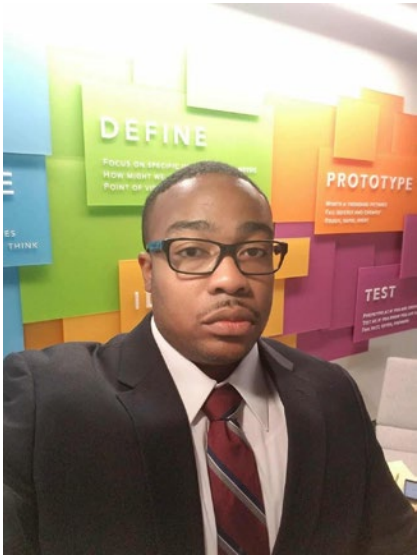
Ask Ethan what he wants people to remember about him and he doesn’t talk about a flyer, or a gate count, or a win light. He talks about tone. “I just want people to say I helped set how we could be together as one,” he says. “Even if we don’t always like each other, we can still figure it out. I want to be remembered as a good person who did what he could, the right way, with what he had.”

The picnic ends late. The trash gets hauled. The pavilion goes quiet. On Monday morning, the group lights back up because somebody needs a part, someone found a phone in the stands, somebody’s aunt needs a prayer, or someone wants to lock in. That’s the point. From hood to hood, and hood to heart, the engine keeps turning.

Interested in sponsoring Hood 2 Hood Racing?

There are multiple entry points, including class sponsorships as well as lower entry points to just help support the event. Local shops, regional brands, national partners and individuals are welcome. If your goal is to support the community that keeps Texas tracks alive week after week, there’s a lane for you.

For more information, reach out to Ethan Williams on Facebook.



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11TH ANNUAL PICNIC
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ADMISSION $25
PITSIDE PARKING $25
FREE PARKING ALONG 287 SPECTATOR SIDE
$5 DOLLAR OFF ADMISSION WITH DONATION OF BRAND NEW UNWRAPPED TOY
SPLIT IMAGE PHOTOGRAPHY

1968

GOLDEN KONG

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SNOW

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PERFORMANCE

WILLIAMS
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